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KEISER  
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WHITE PLAINS, NY

A man who lured ex- CIA agent Edwin Wilson into a federal trap was fined \$831,000 in absentia Tuesday for defrauding a businessman of \$415,000 in a Florida land deal.

Ernest Keiser, 65, vanished Jan. 31 and investigators said they believe he fled to West Germany, where his citizen status may bar extradition.

Prosecutor Frank Castaldi urged Judge Gerard Delaney to sentence Keiser in absentia to up to seven years in jail, but Keiser's attorney William Aronwald argued his client once helped the U.S. government and should not be ordered to jail.

'There was substantial and heroic cooperation by Mr. Keiser with federal authorities,' said Aronwald, noting U.S. Attorney Rudolph Giuliani wrote Westchester prosecutors urging the charges be dismissed.

'He was single-handedly responsible for luring Wilson back to the United States,' said Aronwald. He said Keiser also sought fugitive financier Robert Vesco, met with him in Mexico City in 1984 and then supplied authorities a tape of the conversation.

'Mr Keiser is not an evil man,' added Aronwald, also arguing swindled Mamaroneck, N.Y., investor John Farris was a smart businessman who entered the deal with Keiser with 'his eyes open.'

Delaney agreed a jail term would be useless because he doubts Keiser will ever be seen in the country again, but imposed the fine, telling Castaldi to find whatever assets he could of Keiser's.

'This will at least keep Keiser out of the country and keep him from committing more fraud,' said Delaney.

Keiser helped lure Wilson from Libya to the United States in 1982 with the same property scam.

Wilson, sentenced to over 60 years in jail for arms smuggling, allegedly tried to hire a hitman to kill Keiser. Keiser also claimed to be working to find Nazi war criminal Josef Mengele.

Keiser vanished less than two weeks after being convicted of grand larceny for the Florida land deal. His wife, Bahira, faced perjury charges in a Florida case and fled with him from their Virginia home.

Keiser was convicted Jan. 19 of swindling Farris. The \$830,000 portion of fine represented twice the amount Keiser swindled. The remaining \$1,000 portion was for his conviction for filing a false financial statement.

Keiser jumped \$10,000 bail on the New York charge and \$250,000 bail in Florida, where he allegedly told a Tampa banker he could help squash an indictment in return for \$60,000.

Keiser was convicted of convincing Farris to invest in land Keiser supposedly owned in Florida. Prosecutors said Keiser had only an option to buy the property.